

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:
 - establishing a database of pre-screened service providers;
 - extracting a description of a consumer's needs using interactive questions and answer interviews appropriate for the desired task;
 - packaging and presenting the consumer's needs to multiple service providers that meet a set of predetermined qualifications; and
 - presenting service providers' responses to the consumer after a predetermined number of responses are received.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising receiving confirmation of service transactions by initiating automatic follow-up communication with the consumer and the service providers.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the establishing a database of pre-qualified service providers further includes screening service providers by:
 - making inferences regarding service providers based upon the past data provided;
 - and
 - prioritizing service providers based upon the number of recently received service opportunities.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the service providers are pre-screened based on the information they provide, such as service type, geographic region of operation, service response and fulfillment time, preferred communication mechanism and the types of transaction services for which they would like to be considered.

- 1 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 compiling quantitative ratings and qualitative reviews regarding a service provider
3 involved during a service transaction;
4 assigning a quality seal to the service provider based on the quantitative ratings
5 and qualitative reviews received from the consumers;
6 presenting the quality seal when subjective information regarding the service
7 provider is requested.
- 8 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the interactive interviews allow consumers to
9 narrow the alternatives that describe the service need, while the indications or
10 choices by the consumer lead them to a new set of alternatives and choices.
- 11 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the consumer needs may be presented to the
12 service providers, by way of a set of heterogeneous communication devices
13 depending upon preferences supplied by the service providers.
- 14 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the set heterogeneous communication devices
15 includes facsimile, pager, mobile phone, home phone, office phone, wireless
16 internet device, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) unit and email.
- 17 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the service providers may choose to submit a
18 quote for the consumer's needs, indicate a desire to be referred, or reject the task.
- 19 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the consumer after receiving service providers'
20 responses may then select from the pre-qualified service providers based upon one
21 or more objective and/or subjective factors associated with the pre-qualified
22 service providers.

1 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the objective and subjective factors may be
2 collected by the system and presented to the consumer along with the service
3 provider responses, and a database of consumer-generated service provider ratings
4 and/or reviews.

1 12. The method of claim 4, wherein the service providers are directed to a Service
2 Provider Enrollment Process (SPEP) for enrollment, after the service provider has
3 decided to enroll in the service.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
capturing basic information on service providers;
collecting additional preference information to support the most effective CSR
Matching Process;
creating a unique service provider profile for each service provider;
providing service providers the option of personalizing the website home page to
meet their specific preferences;
notifying service providers of projects that have been submitted to the service for
which the service provider is eligible;
recognizing service providers upon return to their site.

1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein the basic information includes business name,
2 address, number of years in operation, number of employees, one or more service
3 interests, and credit information.

1 15. The method of claim 13, wherein the preference information includes one or more
2 service types, geographic region of operation, service expenditure size range,
3 service response and fulfillment time, and a preferred communication mechanism.

1 16. The method of claim 13, wherein the service provider profile can be updated from
2 time-to-time by service providers, by changing their preferences.

1 17. The method of claim 16, wherein the preference information further includes the
type of CSRs that the service providers are interested in seeing, such as quotes
versus referrals.

1 18. The method of claim 16, wherein the preferred communication mechanism may
be a pager, automated telephone, wireless internet device, IVR database, facsimile
and e-mail.

1 19. The method of claim 14, further comprising encouraging service providers to
identify potential service provider participants that can be contacted regarding the
service, launching communication and creating a Referred Prospect Profile (RPP).

1 20. The method of claim 19, where the RPP is used to support automated searches of
2 online and offline databases further enhancing the information contained in the
3 RPP, by importing search results into the RPP.

1 21. The method of claim 19, where the RPP may be used to:
2 launch a pre-formatted, semi-customizable communication via one of multiple
3 communication mechanisms, or
4 initiate a telemarketing or direct sales effort to the Referred Prospect.

1 22. The method of claim 1, wherein the Pre-Qualification Process includes:
2 reviewing objective criteria and capturing relevant information in the service
3 provider profile;
4 submitting a request for licensing confirmation to the relevant licensing body;
5 submitting a request for insurance coverage confirmation to the relevant insurance
6 company indicated through the SPEP and resident in the service provider
7 profile;
8 submitting a request for business credit status to one or more third-party agencies
9 based on information resident in the service provider profile;
10 submitting a request for legal and bankruptcy review to the relevant state's
11 Attorney General's Office or third-party information service bureau based
12 on information resident in the service provider profile;
13 submitting a request to the relevant agency or group, that capture negative
14 information based consumer feedback, based on information resident in
15 the service provider profile;
16 contacting references, when required from service providers, via email, physical
17 mail or telephone and questioned regarding the performance of a specific
18 service provider.

1 23. The method of claim 22, where the Pre-Qualification Process, where feasible, is
2 done automatically.

1 24. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 capturing basic information on consumers;
3 creating a unique consumer profile for each consumer;

4 providing consumers the option of personalizing the website home page to meet
5 their specific preferences;
6 developing an overall design theme for the website within the context of
7 metaphorical scheme, such as home;
8 providing complete listing of, but not limited to, participating service providers
9 with searching capability by categories, such as geography, service
10 category, rating score;
11 recognizing consumers upon return to their site;
12 determining consumer patterns with regards to subject interest and navigation,
13 such that anticipating preferences and presenting content are likely to be of
14 interest to the specific consumer.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the basic information includes name, address,
email address, anticipated service needs, property type, and an indication of
geography.
26. The method of claim 24, further includes the option of updating Consumer Profile
from time-to-time by consumers, by changing their preferences.
27. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
consumers confirming completion of a service transaction based on a CSR; and
service providers confirming the completion of a service transaction, once the
consumer has already confirmed consummation of the service transaction;
28. The method of claim 27, further comprising:
consumers submitting the Consumer Feedback Form and the Rating & Review
Process; and

4 service providers submitting the input form rating their experience with the
5 service for a specific service transaction.

1 29. The method of claim 27, further comprising:
2 confirming the accuracy and validity of the transaction, once the consumer and the
3 service provider have confirmed a service transaction; and
4 "flagging" the situation where a CSR has received sufficient interest, but neither
5 the consumer nor the service provider has, upon Follow-Up, confirmed
6 consummating a service transaction.

al 7 30. A method of facilitating commerce between service providers and consumers
8 comprising:
9 providing a competitive environment in which consumers can select an
10 appropriate service provider based on full services quotes, objective
11 information and subjective consumer ratings and reviews relating to the
12 service providers;
uniting consumers and service providers by matching consumer needs to service
providers' capabilities and identifying appropriate and pre-qualified
service providers; and
completing a full loop, by matching consumers to only those pre-qualified service
providers who have confirmed their interest in performing the requested
service.

1 31. The method of claim 30, further comprising guiding consumers through a
2 Consumer-driven Service Request (CSR) Process, where a consumer user desiring
3 to submit a service need for quote or referral may proceed through the CSR

process, which describes and defines their service need, and packages it in a meaningful way for the service providers.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein the CSR process may include interactive questions and answer interview or template process, which delivers a detailed description of the consumer's service need.

33. The method of claim 30, further comprising providing enrolled consumer users with status information for their active CSRs.

34. The method of claim 30, further comprising providing enrolled service providers with detailed information on available CSRs.

35. The method of claim 34, further comprising providing enrolled service providers information regarding past services referred or quoted through the service.

36. The method of claim 30, further comprising providing enrolled service providers with status information for their active CSRs.

37. A method comprising:
receiving an indication of a service category from a consumer;
developing a detailed description of the consumer's service needs by receiving
consumer input using interactive questions and answer interviews
generated by a decision tree based upon currently available information
about the consumer's service needs; and
soliciting quotes on behalf of the consumer from a plurality of pre-screened
service providers by packaging the consumer's service needs as a service
request and delivering the service request to each of the plurality of pre-

10 screened service providers, the service request including appropriately
11 descriptive and detailed information to enable service providers associated
12 with the service category to provide a firm quote;
13 compiling a list of pre-qualified service providers who have confirmed their
14 interest in meeting the consumer's service needs, by using the Intuitive
15 Predicting Method, where inferences are made based on the past data
16 provided by service providers, and by selecting service providers with the
17 least number of recent service opportunities.

38. The method of claim 37, further comprising:
receiving consumer input relating to the consumer's service need; and
guiding the consumer to the service category by presenting additional questions
and using information gathered to cross reference a knowledge
management database.
39. The method of claim 37, wherein the service request includes appropriate
measurements, product identifiers and desired solutions.
40. The method of claim 37, further comprising presenting the consumer with an
appropriate templated form for the consumer's service need.
41. The method of claim 37, further comprising presenting the consumer with one or
more visual images, such as photos or drawings, to facilitate development of a
correct service need description.
42. The method of claim 37, wherein consumers may indicate a preferred
communication mechanism for use by service providers.

1 43. The method of claim 37, wherein consumers may indicate deadline for completion
2 of their service need.

1 44. The method of claim 37, wherein consumers may indicate their preference of
2 quantitative rating factors, such as timeliness, price and cleanliness.

1 45. The method of claim 44, wherein quantitative rating factors are used to develop a
2 composite service provider rating for use in matching.

46. A method of matching consumers and service providers comprising:
service providers submitting basic information, including name, address, years in
operation, and preference information, including service types, geographic
region of operation and a preferred communication mechanism;
creating a unique service provider profile for each service provider;
consumers submitting the Consumer Service Request including basic information,
such as name, address and location of service, and preference information,
such as price, timeliness and communication mechanism;
creating a unique consumer profile for each consumer;
identifying a set of qualified service providers from a database of service
providers that are eligible to quote or be referred to a consumer based upon
the CSR;
presenting service providers with sufficiently descriptive and detailed consumer
data based upon the CSR;
service providers acknowledging the CSR and confirming their interest in
performing the service;

17 service providers responding with quote or referral, based on the information
18 included in the CSR;
19 compiling a list of pre-qualified service providers who have confirmed their
20 interest in meeting the consumer's service needs, by using the Intuitive
21 Predicting Method, where inferences are made based on the past data
22 provided by service providers;
23 modifying the list of service providers, by selecting service providers with the
24 least number of recent service opportunities;
25 consumers receiving a communication from commerce facilitator, confirming
26 receipt and summarizing the CSR, using the preferred communication
27 mechanism; and
28 consumers receiving the list of service providers, who have confirmed their
29 interest in performing the service, with requested quotes or referrals.

47. The method of claim 46, further comprising providing an option for consumers to
save their CSR for adding information later, but prior to submittal.

48. The method of claim 46, wherein the communication may be triggered by the
process completion and include additional information, depending on the
anticipated time to complete the CSR Matching Process.

49. The method of claim 46, wherein the CSR contains certain information
components that may be used as key matching components, such price, timeliness,
service category, location and rating factors.

- 1 50. The method of claim 46, wherein the CSRs are matched against the appropriate
2 service provider profiles, using information components within the service
3 provider profile, as key matching components.
- 1 51. The method of claim 46, wherein the online communication mechanisms are, but
2 not limited to, e-mail, Internet website and wireless internet.
- 1 52. The method of claim 46, wherein e-mail, wireless internet and website are the
primary communication mechanism, unless otherwise stipulated via service
provider preferences.
53. The method of claim 46, wherein the offline communication mechanisms are, but
not limited to, pager, automated telephone, IVR database and facsimile.
54. The method of claim 46, further comprising:
analyzing submitted responses to ensure inclusion of all the required information;
prompting service providers to provide missing information.
- 1 55. The method of claim 46, further comprising presenting consumers with results,
2 upon completion of Service Provider Response Process, using their preferred
3 communication mechanism.
- 1 56. The method of claim 55, wherein the results include a summary of the service
2 providers eligible for referral for a specific CSR, where summary includes Rating
3 & Review summary.
- 1 57. The method of claim 55, further comprising providing options for consumers to:

2 request more detailed information on a specific service provider by potentially
3 linking to the service provider's website;
4 sort presentation order based on different variables, such as composite rating, cost,
5 service provider location;
6 indicate communication preferences including who will initiate communication,
7 i.e. the consumer or the service provider, the medium of communication to
8 be used and when the communication is to be initiated;
9 indicate their choice of service provider, in the event that quotes have been
10 submitted, rank their preferences, and consummate service transaction.

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1 58. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sequences of
2 instructions, the sequences of instruction which, when executed by a processor,
3 cause the processor to perform the steps of:
4 establishing a database of pre-screened service providers, based on Pre-
5 Qualification Process;
6 extracting a description of the consumer's needs from a consumer using
7 interactive question and answer interviews appropriate for the desired task;
8 packaging and presenting consumer needs to multiple service providers that meet
9 a set of predetermined qualifications;
10 presenting service providers' responses to the consumer, once sufficient number
11 of responses are received.

1 59. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sequences of
2 instructions, the sequences of instruction which, when executed by a processor,
3 cause the processor to perform the steps of:
4 providing a competitive environment in which consumers can select an
5 appropriate service provider based on full services quotes, objective
6 information and subjective consumer ratings and reviews relating to the
7 service providers;
8 uniting consumers and service providers by matching consumer needs to service
9 providers' capabilities and identifying appropriate and pre-qualified
10 service providers; and
11 completing a full loop, by matching consumers to only those pre-qualified service
12 providers who have confirmed their interest in performing the requested
13 service.

1 60. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sequences of
2 instructions, the sequences of instruction which, when executed by a processor,
3 cause the processor to perform the steps of:

4 developing a detailed description of the consumer's service needs by receiving
5 consumer input using interactive questions and answer interviews
6 generated by a decision tree based upon currently available information
7 about the consumer's service needs; and

8 soliciting quotes on behalf of the consumer from a plurality of pre-screened
9 service providers by packaging the consumer's service needs as a service
10 request and delivering the service request to each of the plurality of pre-
11 screened service providers, the service request including appropriately
12 descriptive and detailed information to enable service providers associated
13 with the service category to provide a firm quote;

14 compiling a list of pre-qualified service providers who have confirmed their
15 interest in meeting the consumer's service needs, by using the Intuitive
16 Predicting Method, where inferences are made based on the past data
17 provided by service providers, and by selecting service providers with the
18 least number of recent service opportunities.

1 61. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sequences of
2 instructions, the sequences of instruction which, when executed by a processor,
3 cause the processor to perform the steps of:

4 service providers submitting basic information, including name, address, years in
5 operation, and preference information, including service types, geographic
6 region of operation and a preferred communication mechanism;

